

Supported Employment

Implementation Resource Kit



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES
Shaping Mental Health Services Toward Recovery

DRAFT VERSION
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Information for Families and Other Supporters

As a family member/supporter, you are well aware that people with mental illness have many talents and abilities that are often overlooked. These include the ability and motivation to work. Work is an important part of the recovery process for many consumers. Research has shown that:

- ▶ 70% of adults with a severe mental illness desire work.
- ▶ 60% or more of adults with severe mental illness can be successful at working when using supported employment.

For many consumers the opportunity to have a regular job is an important part of their recovery process. Even so, you may have some concerns as a family member/supporter. The following section addresses some of those concerns and provides you with information about supported employment.

What is supported employment?

Supported employment programs help people find competitive jobs, (that is, jobs that pay at least minimum wage that any person can apply for) that are based on the person's preferences and abilities. Supported employment is based on six principles.

- ▶ *Eligibility is based on consumer choice.* No one is excluded who wants to participate.
- ▶ *Supported employment is integrated with treatment.* Employment specialists coordinate plans with the treatment team: case manager, therapist, psychiatrist, etc.
- ▶ *Competitive employment is the goal.* The focus is community jobs anyone can apply for that pay at least minimum wage, including part-time and full-time jobs.
- ▶ *Job search starts soon after a consumer expresses interest in working.* There are no requirements for completing extensive pre-employment assessment and training, or intermediate work experiences (like prevocational work units, transitional employment, or sheltered workshops).
- ▶ *Follow-along supports are continuous.* Individualized supports to maintain employment continue as long as consumers want the assistance.
- ▶ *Consumer preferences are important.* Choices and decisions about work and support are individualized based on the person's preferences, strengths, and experiences.

Who provides supported employment?

Employment specialists work one-to-one with up to 25 people throughout the employment process. Employment specialists collaborate closely with case managers and others on the mental health team to support consumers' work efforts.

Does supported employment work?

Yes, research has repeatedly demonstrated the effectiveness of supported employment. Consumers, family members, and professionals have identified supported employment as an important service.

Does supported employment consider what my family member or friend wants to do for work?

Yes, in supported employment, the employment specialist assists consumers in identifying their career goals and personal abilities. The employment specialist then helps consumers find jobs that fit their personal preferences, strengths, and experiences.

Can my family member or friend receive supported employment services even if he or she does not want to work full time?

Yes, the goal of supported employment is to help people find jobs that fit their career goals and their lifestyles. For some people, this may mean starting with only a few hours of work each week.

Will earning an income create problems regarding benefits that my family member is receiving?

Supported employment includes benefits planning. Employment specialists help consumers obtain accurate benefits information so that they can make informed decisions. Most people are able to work and continue to receive some benefits.

Do employers hire consumers?

Yes, research shows that supported employment programs can locate employers who are interested in hiring qualified people who match the job requirements. The goal of the job search in supported employment is to find a good fit for everyone.

Does supported employment continue to provide services after my family member or friend has found a suitable job?

Yes, the employment specialist and the treatment team continue to provide support when the person is working for as long as the person finds the support helpful. Working is sometimes stressful. Support comes from the whole team including family and other supporters, employment specialists, and the rest of the treatment team.

It is not uncommon for people to make several attempts before keeping a job. The employment specialist and the treatment team provide support when people are transitioning to different jobs.

My family member or friend has more difficulties with his illness at certain times. How does supported employment handle these fluctuations?

Employment specialists provide ongoing assessment and support while the consumer is working. They communicate frequently with other members of the consumer's treatment team.

How much do employment specialists know about mental illness and about my family member or friend?

Employment specialists collaborate closely with the other members of the treatment team for your family member or friend. They exchange information with other team members. Employment specialists receive training and supervision regarding mental illness.

What happens if my family member is not able to work, even with the help of the supported employment program? Will other services still be available?

Consumers are still eligible for other services even when they are not working or stop receiving supported employment services. Whatever other types of services are provided in your community should still be available to your family member. A case manager can help your family member access what services are needed.

How can families or supporters help?

Providing support to your family member or friend's efforts in searching and finding work can help. You can show your interest by learning about supported employment. The job search process is enhanced when you share the interests and talents of your family member or friend with the employment specialist and the treatment team.

Have other agencies used this vocational approach?

Yes, supported employment is being used, with good results, by numerous agencies across the country.

For more information:

Supported employment services are provided by numerous agencies across the country. If you, your family member, or treatment providers are interested in knowing more about supported employment, contact staff at your local mental health or vocational agency.

Information about supported employment, as well as other evidence-based practices for the treatment of mental illness in the community, can also be found at www.mentalhealthpractices.org.